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*The Alps
of the
King-Kern
Divide*

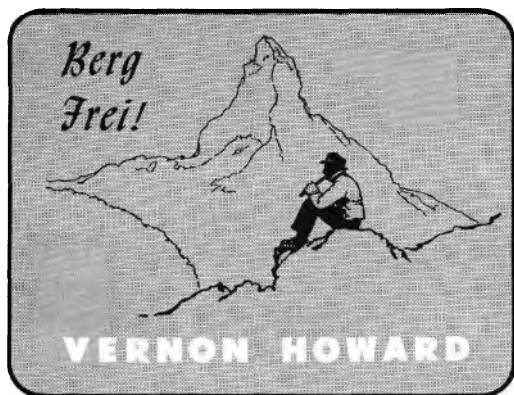


David Starr Jordan

To my dear friend,
G. Fred Clark.
Harry Meade Clark.

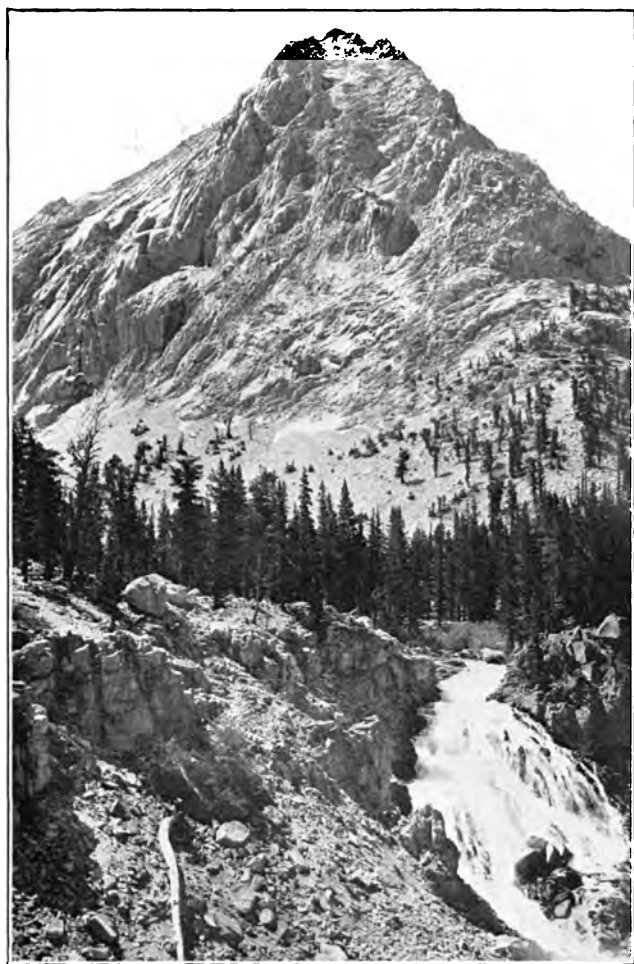
May 29, 1915
Oak Joss, Cal.

Today is better than yesterday and
tomorrow will be better than
Today. - Harland Motto.



Richard K. Irvine
December 1976.

**THE ALPS OF
KING-KERN DIVIDE**



The East Vidette

THE ALPS OF KING-KERN DIVIDE

BY
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PRESIDENT STANFORD UNIVERSITY

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A. M. ROBERTSON
1907

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PREFATORY NOTE.

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THE ALPS OF KING-KERN DIVIDE

THE high Sierras, the huge crests at the head of the King's, Kern, Kaweah, and San Joaquin rivers, are Alps indeed, not lower than the grandest of those in Europe, and scarcely inferior in magnificence. The number of peaks in this region which pass the limit of 13,000 feet is not less than in all Switzerland. The highest of these peaks, Mount Whitney, is given by U. S. Geological Survey as 14,501 feet in height. It is thus a little lower than the Matterhorn (14,705), while Mt. Blanc (15,731), Monte Rosa (15,366), the Mischabelhorn (14,941), and the Weisshorn (14,803), outrank it a little more. But virtually all reach much the same level, and between these peaks, and the next

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in rank in Switzerland, the Finster Aarhorn (14,026), California claims a good many, notably Mount Williamson (14,384), Tyndall (14,025), Jordan (14,212), Junction (13,903), two of the Kaweahs (13,728 and 13,816), and Barnard, Keith, Agassiz's Needles, Dusy, Sheep Mountain, Milestone, and the South Palisade, each something over 14,000 feet, and a host of high points, as University of California Peak (13,588), Gould Peak (13,001), Rixford, Brewer (13,577), Stanford University Peak (13,983), Gregory's Monument (13,960), Crag Ericsson (13,625), Lyell, and a host of others named and unnamed which fall but little below. In this we need not mention Shasta (14,400), lone and tremendous, but which, a gigantic mass of cold lava, is put up independently on a different plan and in another part of the state.

**The North Guard
of Mt. Brewer**



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If for a moment we compare the high Sierra Nevada with the Alps, we find in the mountains of Switzerland greater variety of form, and of rock formation, and with greater picturesqueness in color, the white of the snow being sharply contrasted with the green of the flower-carpeted pastures. The rainfall and the snowfall of the Alps are far more excessive, hence all the deep valleys are filled with snow; each cañon has its glaciers, the vast slow-melting snow masses becoming compacted into ice before they disappear.

The Sierras are richer in color, and they throb with life. The dry air that flows over them is stimulating, balsam-laden, and always transparent to the vision. The Alps are almost always bathed in rain or swathed in clouds. Their air is clear only when it has been newly washed by some wild storm.

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When a storm is over, the sky soon needs washing again, and in its blue reaches it is full of a streamy suggestion as though it had not been properly dried.

The glacial basins of the high Sierras, huge tracts of polished granite, furrowed by streams and fringed with mountain vegetation, are far more impressive than similar regions in the Alps. In the Alps the glaciers are still alive and at work. In the Sierras, a few little ones are left here and there, high on the flanks of precipices, but the valleys below them, once filled with ice, are now bare, slicken and sheep-backed or clogged with moraines, just as the glaciers left them. The wreck of the vanished glacier, as in Ouzel Basin of Mt. Brewer, and Desolation Valley of Pyramid Peak, may tell us more of what a glacier does than a living glacier itself.

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The forests of the Sierras are beyond comparison nobler than those of the Alps. The pine, fir, and larch woods of Switzerland are only second growth, mere brush, by the side of the huge pines (Sugar Pine, Yellow Pine, and High Mountain Pine) of the flanks of the Sierras. Giant firs and spruces, too, rival the largest trees on earth, while above all, supremely pre-eminent over all other vegetation, towers the giant Sequoia, mightiest of trees. On a small tree, ten feet through, cut at Sequoia Mills, I counted 1902 rings of annual growth. This tree was a sapling, four feet through, at the time of the fall of Rome. The greatest Sequoias, happily yet uncut, have doubtless four times this age, and it is safe to say many of them have stood on earth at least 8000 years. Converse, the discoverer of the Converse Basin, in Tulare County,

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claims to have counted 11,000 rings.

So far as man is concerned, there are great differences between the Sierras and the Alps. The Alps have good roads, trails, hotels everywhere. They are thoroughly civilized, provided with guides, guide-posts, ropes and railings, and the traveler, whatever else he may do, cannot go astray. If he gets lost he has plenty of company. The Sierras are uninhabited. In their high reaches there is no hotel, and not often a shed or a roof of any kind. The trails are rough, and when one climbs out from the cañons he has only to go as he pleases. But wherever he goes he cannot fail to be pleased. The Sierras are far more hospitable than the Alps, and the danger of accident is far less. Every day in the Alps may be a day of storm, and no one can safely sleep in the open air. In the Sierras there are but two or

**Mt. Brewer from
Charlotte Peak**



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three rainy days in the summer, and these are thunder-showers in August afternoons. The weather is scarcely a factor to be considered; every day is a good day, one or two perhaps a little better.

The traveler is sure of dry, clear air, a little brisk and frosty in the morning, making a blanket welcome, but all he needs is a blanket. For luxury he will make a bonfire of dry branches—pine, cedar, cottonwood, all burn alike—and there is always a dead tree ready to his hand. He will build his fire near the brook that he may put out its smoldering embers in the morning. No matter how high his flame may rise in the evening, with morning only embers are left. And surely no mountain lover will leave his fire uncovered to burn and murder its way through the forest. The United States government now has its rangers

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out to protect the forests from fire, and to punish the careless camper, be he angler, mountaineer, or prospector. This is most wise, and it should have been done long ago. More than this, the state or government should never let another acre of land on the Sierras be denuded of its timber. On the preservation of our forests depends the fertility of our plains. To California this matter is vital above all others. Commerce will come in due time whatever we do; but a forest once uprooted, we can never restore. The great Calaveras grove of Sequoias is now for sale, the first known, and, perhaps, the most picturesque of all, going to the lumber man who will make the highest bid. To destroy this noblest of groves for the lumber that is in it would be barbarous. There should be but one bidder for the Calaveras grove—the people of the United States.

**Part of the King-Kern Divide
from Charlotte Peak**



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We cannot call ourselves civilized if we stand by, consenting to its destruction, as we have done to the slaughter of the great Sequoias of the Converse Basin, with brush, sawdust and soil, all, save the primeval granite, vanishing in the final conflagration of the abandoned lumber camps.

In the high Sierras, the form of the mountains favors the climber. Each peak is part of a great anticlinal fold, broken and precipitous on the east side, retaining the original slope on the west. Most of the mountains about Mt. Whitney share the form of that mountain. A gentle slope on the west side, covered by broken, frost-bitten rocks; on the east side a perpendicular descent to an abyss. On the east and north almost every peak is vertical and inaccessible, while the west side offers no difficulty. With time and patience any good

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walker may creep upward over the broken stones and climb the highest of them. All of them require endurance, for they are very high, but few of them demand any special skill or any nervous strain, and the views the summits yield are most repaying.

To reach the best of them one should take the railroad to Sanger or Visalia, and then stages to any of the trails which lead to the King's River Basin. In a ride, preferably taken at night, all night, he crosses the hot plains of the foothills. Turning in at midnight, he sleeps till morning, then taking the stage again, he rides up hill all day, past Millwood, the General Grant National Park, with its giant Sequoias, and through the pine forests to Huckleberry Camp. Here he is met by a troop of saddle horses, and a charming day's ride obliquely down the slopes of King's

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River Cañon, brings him at night to a camp in the river bottom. There may be a house there or a tent, but he needs neither, for the night is full of stars—and the stars keep off the rain. Taking his horse again in the morning, by noon he reaches the Sentinel Camp, which is the best center for excursions. Here are usually horses, mules, tents, and blankets for rent, and provisions for sale, so that henceforth all the traveler needs to take with him will be strong clothing, stout nailed shoes, and good temper.

The King's River Cañon he will contrast with the Yosemite. The Yosemite has finer single rocks, higher single cliffs, far more majestic waterfalls, and a general air of perfection as scenery. Nature has done her best and confidently rests her case. The King's River Cañon is on a larger scale, with higher walls, which slope backward out of

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sight, and the mountains into which it rises are far wilder and more stupendous.

The traveler will not be long in the Cañon before he will want to climb up to take a look at some of these. He may wind up the dusty trail to Goat Mountain and see them all at once in glorious waves of distances. He may, perhaps, crawl to the top of the grand Sentinel and see some of them at another angle. He may wander to Kearsarge Pass, on the Main Divide, at the head of the Cañon, and see the world from one of the three great peaks, Rixford, Gould, or the highest of all, the huge mass of crumbling granite called University of California Peak. Or he may turn toward the heart of the mountains themselves and lay his camp at East Lake in the Ouzel Basin, the wonderful glaciated north slope of Mt. Brewer. Here John

**View North from
Arrow Peak**



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Muir studied the water-ouzel in its home, and wrote of it the best biography yet given of any bird; and here, too, you may watch the ouzel and the winter wren, the marmot and the mountain chipmunks.

The tributaries of the King's and Kern form a paradise to anglers. The clearest and coldest of streams, flowing swiftly but for the most part evenly over granite rocks. These streams are the home of the Gilbert trout (*Salmo gilberti*), one of the finest offshoots of the California Rainbow trout. In the main streams this trout reaches a large size. In the head waters of the Kern, shut off by waterfalls, and on a bottom of red granite, these large trout have given place to the three exquisite species known as Golden trout. These trout are of small size, but most brilliant colors, being forced by natural selection

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to imitate the red rocks on which they lie. In three different tributaries of the upper Kern a distinct species has been developed, the parallelism of appearance being due to the life conditions of their origin. In the south fork of the Kern is *Salmo aguabonita*, the longest known of the Golden trout, described by the present writer fifteen years ago. Lately, Dr. B. W. Evermann has discovered and named the Roosevelt trout (*Salmo roosevelti*) of Volcano Creek and the White trout (*Salmo whitei*), named for Stewart Edward White of Soda Creek. All these exquisite trout are very unsuspecting, ready to take the hook, and they fall an easy prey to the trout murderer, who sometimes also invades these mountain fastnesses. It is to be hoped that the reader of this book will be a gentle angler and touch these troutlets sparingly. Remember that the

**View South from
Mt. Brewer**



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true angler has certain duties as well as privileges. It is always better to lie about your great catch than to make it!

From the Ouzel Basin or from the Kern Valley you may climb Mt. Brewer (13,886 feet), the culminating outpost of the cross-divide between the King's and the Kern. Or you may go farther, turning eastward into the very center of the frost-king's domains, climbing the gorge of turbulent Stanford brook, past stately Crag Ericsson, over Harrison's Pass, an old sheep trail, steep, dusty, hopeless, filled with loose rock, to the frost-bitten crag named for the University of Stanford. This peak lies in the King's-Kern divide, in the very center of the high Sierras. It is a double-topped ridge, the highest summit 14,100 feet, the southernmost, known as Gregory's Monument, about 20 feet lower.

From this peak one may see nearly all

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the high Sierras, from the San Joaquin Alps on the north to the Kern Alps on the south; and whoso once climbs this crag or the peak of its sister university, or any other of their craggy brethren, has earned a place in the roll of honor of those "whose feet are beautiful on the mountains." He will join the Sierra Club. He will hold up the hands of President Roosevelt and of Gifford Pinchot and of all others who struggle against the wanton destruction of our forests and the desecration of our mountains, and whenever the fates permit, he will wander back to the "heart of the Sierras," the Ouzel Basin, the golden trout streams, and the Mountains of the Great Divide!

Certainly there can be no more marvelous sport than mountaineering- in fact it almost presents a way of life. Its way is hard and cold and often tortuous, but it always leads to paths unfolding almost unearthly beauty and radiance- perhaps bringing one closer to reality.